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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 6099
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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0927
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 1402
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RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000381

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

SIPDIS
E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Aftermath of Israeli Elections

Key stories in the media:

HaQaretz quoted an Israeli government source as saying that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is due to arrive in Israel on March 3. The newspaper reported that National Security Advisor James Jones will come to Israel on February 24.

Former Deputy National Security Advisor Elliot Abrams was quoted as saying in an interview with The Jerusalem Post that Netanyahu and President Obama will get along fine on a personal level, but that both leaders' entourages and many external factors will determine the shape of their relationship.

Leading media quoted deputy Hamas leader Moussa Abu Marzouk as saying in Cairo that Egypt will proclaim an 18-month truce in two or three days -- a deal that would not include the release of Gilad Shalit. Israel Radio noted that Israel has not responded to the report. The radio cited the London-based Al-Hayat as saying that the Shalit issue will be solved in a few days.

All media quoted the Central Elections Committee as saying yesterday that the final tally of Knesset seats remained unchanged after absentee ballots of soldiers, diplomats, and others were counted. The media reported that government coalition negotiations revolve around demands by Yisrael Beiteinu's Avigdor Lieberman on civil unions, conversion, and the system of government. Yediot reported that Shas would absolutely refuse to give a free hand for such legislation in the Knesset. Israel Radio reported that United Torah Judaism agrees with Shas on these points. HaQaretz said that it may not be possible to appoint Yisrael Beiteinu chairman Avigdor Lieberman as finance minister -- a possibility that had been discussed during the coalition talks of the past two days -- because the Tax Authority, which is part of the Finance Ministry, is involved in a criminal investigation of Lieberman. Maariv (Ben Caspit) cited the possibility of forming a national unity government without Yisrael Beiteinu, which Likud MK Israel Katz denied in an interview with Israel Radio this morning. Some media quoted associates of Kadima chairwoman Tzipi Livni as saying that the party should either lead the coalition or quit it. HaQaretz quoted Livni as saying in consultations over the past two days that her party will not join a right-wing government comprising ultra-Orthodox parties. However, HaQaretz quoted a senior Kadima official as saying that the party probably would eventually join Netanyahu's government and that it would demand the foreign and defense portfolios for Livni and Shaul Mofaz, or the foreign and education portfolios for Livni and Knesset Speaker Dalia Itzik.

HaQaretz quoted a Turkish official as saying that Israel and Syria were about to announce that they would speak directly a week before the fighting in Gaza broke out, leading to Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan's feeling of betrayal. The source was quoted as saying that PM Ehud Olmert, Erdogan, and Syrian President Bashar Assad had held a four-hour, three-way telephone conversation during Olmert's visit to Ankara, and that they had mediated in crafting a joint statement.

The statement had been expected to include an agreement to adhere to the understanding reached with Yitzhak Rabin. This stipulated that Israel would be prepared to withdraw from the entire Golan in exchange for permanent peace and security arrangements, as well as agreement on what the term normalization would mean for future peaceful relations.

The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that relief measures will be instituted for Palestinians in the West Bank. High-ranking IDF officers and leaders of the security organizations in the PA have agreed that the removal of roadblocks will continue, twelve new Palestinian police stations will be opened, and the operation of the security organizations will be expanded. In order to strengthen the Palestinian economy, it has been decided to allow residents of the Arab sector to enter some of the cities in the northern West Bank and to increase the number of Palestinians permitted to work in Israel. The number of permits that allow freedom of movement for Palestinian VIPs and members of its security organizations will also be increased.

The Jerusalem Post quoted senior GOI officials as saying yesterday that Israel would prefer -- if an international peace conference becomes inevitable -- that it be hosted by Russia, not France. The newspaper noted that Israel is not enthused at this time about any such conference.

HaQaretz quoted U.S. Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair as saying this week in the U.S. Senate that Israel might enter a confrontation or a crisis this year with Iran. Leading media quoted CIA Director Leon Panetta as saying last week in testimony on Capitol Hill that he has little doubt that Iran is seeking nuclear

weapons.

HaQaretz and other media reported that Israel warned Hizbullah this week that it will respond harshly to any attempt to down an IAF jet over Lebanon or to avenge last year's assassination of the organization's operations officer, Imad Mughniyah.

HaQaretz reported that the European Union has decided to freeze a planned upgrade in its relationship with Israel until a new government is established and resumes the peace process with the Palestinians. The EU is also demanding that the new government freezes settlement construction.

The media reported that elected National Union candidate Michael Ben-Ari has appointed notorious far-Right activist Itamar Ben-Gvir as his media and legal adviser.

The Jerusalem Post reported that medicine bottles, transferred to Gaza as humanitarian aid from Israel, were used by Hamas as grenades against IDF troops during Operation Cast Lead.

Media reported that Pope Benedict XVI told American Jewish leaders at the Vatican yesterday that any denial or minimization of the Holocaust is Qintolerable.

Aftermath of Israeli Elections:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: Q[NetanyahuQs] choice of coalition partners will tell us how he intends to lead Israel in the coming years.

Popular liberal novelist Meir Shalev wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: Q[Netanyahu] and his people did every possible nasty trick to present [the election results] as a victory.

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized: QThe public has expressed its strenuous opposition to the Kadima governmentQs way and the Sharon legacy that it represents.

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: QThe Obama administration's interest in courting Iran and the Arab world places Jerusalem on a collision course with Washington.... [In any case] Israel's governments have little ability to influence how foreign governments treat it regardless of who forms those governments.

Block Quotes:

II. "NetanyahuQs Choice"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (2/13): QBenjamin Netanyahu will be Israel's next prime minister. That is the conclusion required by the outcome of the election, which strengthened the rightist bloc.... During the campaign, Netanyahu said that the worst mistake of his previous term was his decision to form a rightist government rather than a coalition with Labor. He surely remembers that the right-wing factions were the ones that brought his government down after he signed the Wye River Memorandum with Yasser Arafat. Now, he once again faces the choice between an ideological government centered around opposition to territorial withdrawals and a government that would be more attentive to the international community. Neither would be Netanyahu's dream government. But his choice of coalition partners will tell us how he intends to lead Israel in the coming years.

II. "Coalition and Opposition"

Popular liberal novelist Meir Shalev wrote in the mass-circulation,

pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/13): QI hoped for a Kadima-Likud-Labor coalition that would leave Shas and Lieberman out. Despite the differences and the slanders, there is no big discrepancy among the three parties. They have the same security views and a similar economic perspective. All have similar voters. They begin to understand that Israel must talk to its neighbors and make big concessions on the way to an agreement. They start to grasp that the public should not carry the burden of all ultra-Orthodox and settlements.... Unfortunately, such a coalition will not emerge.

Tzipi Livni already held a Qgood meetingQ with Lieberman, so did Netanyahu, and Shas has already prepared a list of demands. It was enough to listen to Netanyahu's post-election speech to understand that there is no chance [for my hope].... This was the speech of a loser who only cares about his desire to rule and who is incapable of acknowledging the results. He and his people did every possible nasty trick to present [the election results] as a victory.

III. "Hurry Up, Bibi!"

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized (2/13): QThe conclusions to be drawn from this week's election are seeping through slowly. It took almost twenty-four hours for the public and the opinion shapers to grasp the victory of the Qright-wing.Q It will take time until the advantages of such a government become obvious.... A right-wing government must focus on national goals, not on survival meant to prevent the shaping of a center-left coalition.... An effective, cohesive coalition should also deal with the worsening economic crisis that is eating up Israel's economic activity.... The public has expressed its strenuous opposition to the Kadima government's way and the Sharon legacy that it represents. The components of the [incoming] government must translate this opposition into effective diplomatic and security policies. Netanyahu's role will be to demonstrate leadership that will convince the coalition components to act in a restrained and responsible fashion. In any case, he should not renounce the opportunity to put together the next government just because he does not view the voters' verdict as perfect.

IV. "Enter the Netanyahu Government"

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/13): QThe Obama administration's interest in courting Iran and the Arab world places Jerusalem on a collision course with Washington. Given the high priority the Obama administration has placed on appeasing Iran, its decision to end U.S. sanctions against Syria, and its intense desire to establish a Palestinian state, it is fairly clear that Israel cannot expect to enjoy good relations with Washington in the coming years without adopting policies that would endanger its survival. It is common wisdom in Israel that the Israeli Left is capable of limiting the level of hostility directed against Israel from the U.S. and Europe. Livni exploited this popular belief during the electoral campaign when she warned that a rightist government would destroy Israel's relations with Washington. Apparently convinced by her warnings, some voices in Likud argue that with Livni and Kadima in the government, the U.S. and the EU will think twice before adopting openly hostile policies. Unfortunately, this view is demonstrably false.... The generally ignored truth is that international hostility towards Israel is driven by factors extraneous to Israel. Consequently, Israel's governments have little ability to influence how foreign governments treat it regardless of who forms those governments.

CUNNINGHAM